

Our Standard of Religion: What is it?

OUR standard is, in a word, the New Testament, pure and simple, from beginning to end, and all of it. We ascend the stream until we reach the fountain head, and then we begin at the beginning. The beginning is not the Day of Pentecost, but "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; as it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee." Mark 1: 1, 2.

This is a clear, unequivocal statement. It means that the New Testament had a beginning, and that was the preaching of John the Baptist in the wilderness of Judea. It is also of supreme importance to know where the Old Testament ends. The same authority settles this question also, at once and forever. "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it." Luke 16: 16. Hence the Old Testament ends where the New Testament begins. The two stand out distinct, the one for the Old Dispensation, the other for the New. Beginning, then, where the New Testament begins, we move out in the living current, and discover that the whole stream, from the fountain to the end, is a pure Gospel stream. There is none of "the law and the prophets," as originally imposed, in it. The decrees of popes, church creeds, confessions and articles of faith do not float on its sacred bosom. It is for the Chris-

tian and for all Christians. John the Baptist was the first messenger of the Gospel. Jesus Christ received baptism at the hands of John, entered upon his ministry, became the head of the church, and the teacher and example of all who would be saved.

Since John the Baptist stands at the beginning of the list as a herald of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and was duly authorized by heaven, it follows as a legitimate conclusion that those whom John taught and baptized should be classed as Christians. Since Christ was the head of the church, it is an incontrovertible fact that all who entered by Christ and his teaching into the church, were Christians. Then the teaching and example of Jesus Christ was the rule of life to all his disciples. The teaching and example of Christ are perfectly consistent. It was for church members, whether Jew or Gentile. The New Testament as a whole is the very embodiment of all rules in Christian life and conduct.

Then the proposition that the New Testament is a unit, complete in itself, containing the rules of life, simple and unmistakable, is the grandest announcement ever made to the inquirer for the way of truth. When a man can, with all confidence, take up the New Testament and read its sacred pages as the Gospel of the Son of God, pure and unmixed, he has the light of heaven beaming in his soul, and he holds in his hand the key that unlocks each door of duty as he reaches it. The man that so reads the Gospel will find Jesus Christ his own interpreter; he will find every precept explained by the example of the Master. The man that reads the Gospel with the light of heaven in his soul will look upon each precept of Jesus as a gem and upon every commandment of the Son of God as a pearl of great price. He will not make a distinction between little duties

and great duties. He will look through them all up to the higher life to which they lead.

We have reached an age in which every question must be settled by a standard. When we raise any question concerning the Christian religion, we must take it to the standard to test its fitness. The standard of Christianity is the New Testament. What is taught in the New Testament is evidently Christian. For a Christian people to practice what is not in the New Testament may, with propriety, be called in question. But when a Christian people teach and practice what is written in the New Testament, what Christ enjoined upon his disciples, who has a right to say that it was only a Jewish custom, and cast his sacred teachings back under the law as a relic of the past? Settle the question by the standard.

Our standard of religion fixes the name of the church and the followers of Christ. "One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren." "The firstborn among many brethren." "He was not ashamed to call them brethren."

Our standard of religion fixes the character of church membership. True religion has its origin in a knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. In the New Covenant God declared that he would write his law in the mind and in the heart of his people. If the Gospel, then, be written in our mind, we will know it; if it be written in our heart, we will live it. Our Lord declared, "My kingdom is not of this world." The people of God are born into this kingdom and follow a new and higher rule of life,—higher than that relating to the mere things of earth.

Taking the New Testament as our standard, we must hold to what Christ taught and practiced and the things he commanded his apostles to teach and practice. This

makes the meal Christ ate with his disciples the Lord's Supper and not the Jewish Passover. Matt. 26: 20, 21. The Lord's Supper is a sacred evening meal. As a Christian institution it was observed in the evening before our Lord was crucified. It was not the Jewish Passover on the one hand, or the bread and cup of Communion on the other. The bread and cup of Communion were taken "after supper." Luke 22: 20. The bread and cup are a memorial of the death and sufferings of Christ on the cross. The Lord's Supper is typical of the "Marriage Supper of the Lamb." Luke 22: 16; Rev. 19: 9. The name of this sacred meal has an interesting history. According to Matthew and Mark the term "passover" is used in connection with its preparation. Luke uses the word "passover" (22: 15), and then the word "supper" (verse 20) in his Gospel. John (chapter 13), in giving an account of our Lord's washing the feet of his disciples, uses the word "supper" in verse 2, and also in verse 4; and says it was "before the feast of the passover when supper was served." Verse 1. This same meal Paul calls the Lord's Supper, 1 Cor. 11: 20; and Jude calls it the "feast of charity," Jude 12.

In John 13 the Gospel standard gives an account of Christ rising from this same "supper," laying aside his garments, taking a towel, girding himself, pouring water into a basin, washing his disciples' feet, and wiping them with the towel wherewith he was girded. Then, after he had washed their feet, had taken his garments, and was seated again at the table, he said unto them, "Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye

should do as I have done to you." Here we see an observance as literal as anything in the Bible, acted out in every detail by the great Teacher and Founder of the Christian religion, and as literally and in detail enjoined upon his disciples to do to one another the same thing and in the same way as he had done to them. If this be a lesson of humility, it is also a lesson of obedience. If, deep down in this act there is a higher truth, a spiritual benefit, lifting the soul heavenward, how shall we reach that truth and obtain the blessing except we obey the precept of the Master? It is through the symbol that we reach the spiritual. If that higher attainment be happiness, if it be to have a part with Christ, if it be to show humility and common brotherhood, then do we see in this example of the Savior not an empty form, but the embodiment of a great truth leading up to a higher life.

Then, in administering the ordinance of baptism, the Gospel standard directs us to go "to the water," where there is "much water," to go "down into the water," and to baptize (bury) the penitent sinner in the likeness of Christ's death, face forward, by a threefold action, into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, invoking God's blessing and the gift of the Holy Spirit, to raise him in the likeness of Christ's resurrection, to come up out of the water to walk in newness of life. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

Finally, this "newness of life," into which the new-born child of God enters, is a life of holiness in obedience to all the commands and precepts of the Gospel. It means the restoration of primitive life and service in the church. It gives to the world the blessings of peace and good will. Let it be recorded that the church of the Brethren is the

messenger of peace, and that she serves and honors Christ as the Prince of Peace, that she holds up the Gospel before the world as the standard of peace. We have in the New Testament a history of peace principles as opposed to war, —a history of suffering for Christ's sake. Let it then be stated as a monument to peace principles, as a monument to the church in ages past and in her life and mission now, as the glory of all lovers of the Prince of Peace, that the church has never stained her garments with human blood. We love our fellow men in proportion as we love God. Our love to God is measured by our love for his law. Our love for the law of God is measured by our obedience to it. The law of God to the Christian is the Gospel, the standard of peace. "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace good will to men."

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